



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

## Edinburgh Research Explorer

### ‘Marenzio’s early years in Rome. New light from archival sources’

**Citation for published version:**

O'Regan, T 2016, "Marenzio's early years in Rome. New light from archival sources", *Philomusica on-line*, vol. 15, no. 1, pp. 804-810. <https://doi.org/10.6092/1826-9001/15.1810>

**Digital Object Identifier (DOI):**

[10.6092/1826-9001/15.1810](https://doi.org/10.6092/1826-9001/15.1810)

**Link:**

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

**Document Version:**

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

**Published In:**

Philomusica on-line

**General rights**

Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Edinburgh Research Explorer is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

**Take down policy**

The University of Edinburgh has made every reasonable effort to ensure that Edinburgh Research Explorer content complies with UK legislation. If you believe that the public display of this file breaches copyright please contact [openaccess@ed.ac.uk](mailto:openaccess@ed.ac.uk) providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.



## **Marenzio's early years in Rome** **New light from archival sources**

**Noel O'Regan**

The University of Edinburgh  
N.O'Regan@ed.ac.uk

§ Two newly-discovered archival documents are used to shed light on Luca Marenzio's activities during his early years in Rome. The documents, from the archives of SS. Ambrogio e Carlo dei Lombardi and S. Maria della Pietà in Campo Santo Teutonico, indicate that Marenzio was employed by both institutions in 1573-4 and 1576 respectively. The scant details of the documents are fleshed-out here and their implications for Marenzio's career are examined.

§ Due nuovi documenti gettano luce sull'attività di Luca Marenzio durante i primi anni del suo soggiorno a Roma. I documenti, che provengono degli archivi delle chiese dei Santi Ambrogio e Carlo dei Lombardi e Santa Maria della Pietà in Campo Santo Teutonico, testimoniano l'impiego del Marenzio in queste istituzioni rispettivamente negli anni 1573-74 e 1576. Nel contributo sono arricchite le scarse indicazioni documentarie ed analizzate le implicazioni per la carriera di Marenzio.

INFORMATION about Luca Marenzio's early years in Rome is still sparse. We do not know when, or in what circumstances, he arrived in the city from the North of Italy, nor do we know much about his activities after he arrived. We learn from a letter written in 1579 by Giovanni Battista Nobili, agent of Cardinal Luigi D'Este, that Marenzio had been in the service of Cristoforo Madruzzo, bishop of Trent, for some unspecified time before the latter's death in July 1578, after which he had transferred to the service of Cardinal D'Este.<sup>1</sup> From that point onwards his career is more clearly documented. Two newly-discovered archival documents help to throw some light on the young composer's activities in the city before that date. While neither provides unambiguous information, between them they help suggest some of the musical activities which Marenzio undertook, or might have undertaken, during his earliest years in the city.

The first of these documents does indeed confirm that Marenzio was maestro di cappella to Cardinal Madruzzo. It is found in the archives of the Arciconfraternita di Santa Maria della Pietà in Campo Santo dei Teutonici e Fiamminghi, a confraternity founded in about 1449 for German and Flemish living in Rome.<sup>2</sup> It is a receipt or *giustificazione di pagamento*, signed by the composer, for the sum of six scudi di moneta which were paid to him for the provision of musicians for an unspecified procession.

Io Lucca Marenzio m[aest]ro di Capella d[e]ll Ill[ustrissi]mo di Trento ho receuto da M. Pietro Alberto di m[one]ta scuti 6 p[er] dar alli musici quali andorno con la processione et in fede de cio ho scritto la pre[sen]te il di ultimo Aprile.<sup>3</sup>

Unfortunately, this receipt is not dated by year. It is, however, found between two other *giustificazioni* dated 1576, which is thus the most likely date, though there are also some *giustificazioni* dated 1577 in close proximity to it. Neither does it tell us what the procession was for which Marenzio provided the music. Given that the payment was received on 30 April, the most likely occasion would have been the procession organised by many Roman confraternities on the evening of Holy Thursday or on Good Friday, visiting St. Peter's Basilica which claimed to possess the *volto santo*, the veil with which Veronica wiped the face of Christ on the way to Calvary, and a section of the lance with which Longinus pierced his body on the cross. These were displayed to processing confraternities, which afterwards continued into the Vatican Palace and visited the *sepolcro* or altar of repose in the Cappella

---

<sup>1</sup> Modena, Archivio di Stato, Ambasciatori (Roma), f. 122. Quoted in S. LEDBETTER, *Luca Marenzio: New Biographical Findings*, PhD diss., New York University 1971, pp. 148 ff. and in M. BIZZARINI, *Marenzio: la carriera di un musicista tra Rinascimento e Controriforma*, Comune di Coccaglio - Promozione Franciacorta, Coccaglio - Rodengo Saiano 1998, p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> M. MARONI LUMBROSO - A. MARTINI, *Le Confraternite romane nelle loro chiese*, Fondazione Marco Besso, Roma 1963, pp. 272-276.

<sup>3</sup> Roma, Archivio del Campo Santo Teutonico, Liber 1: *Libro primo dei conti, ricevute e ordinazioni di Campo Santo 1477-1580*, f. 586.

Paolina.<sup>4</sup> The Campo Santo was situated very close to St. Peter's and so it would not have been a particularly extended procession in its case, unlike that of confraternities whose home was further afield, but one or more groups of musicians would still have been required to accompany it. Six *scudi* could have paid for eight to twelve musicians at this period (depending on their level of skill and whether or not any came from the Cappella Pontificia) and would have represented an average expenditure by confraternities for this occasion. The Arciconfraternita di Santa Maria del Pianto, for example, spent 4 *scudi* and 50 *baiocchi* on singers for their Holy Thursday procession in 1576.<sup>5</sup> The larger and more prestigious Santissima Trinità dei Pellegrini, on the other hand, paid Palestrina 15 *scudi* for musicians who took part in its procession in the same year.<sup>6</sup>

At the same time the archive of the Campo Santo only records a payment to musicians for the Holy Thursday procession twice, in 1587 (2 *scudi* and 60 *baiocchi* to Gismondo di Gismondi) and in the Holy Year of 1650 (18 *scudi* to Orazio Benevoli), so Marenzio's payment could have been for a different occasion. One possibility is that it was a late payment for a procession with pilgrims around the four or seven major churches during the previous Holy Year of 1575. Such a delay in payment was not unheard of in the city at the time. On the other hand there is an earlier payment recorded in the Campo Santo archive on 31 November 1575 of 8 *scudi* to one «Egidio Hanerlo capellano in San Luigi [dei Francesi]...per haver cantato con altri conpagni alla processione de Campo Santo».<sup>7</sup> Again the procession is not specified but the sum of money is considerable and this might have been for musicians accompanying pilgrims around the pilgrimage churches. The 1575 payment could also have been for a procession connected with the general anniversary of deceased members and benefactors which confraternities commemorated in November each year, though there are no payments of this kind specifically noted in the archive of the Campo Santo. Yet another possibility for the procession for which Marenzio provided music is the confraternity's patronal feastday of the Immaculate Conception on 8 December 1575, though the earliest specific payment for musicians for this feast does not come until 1583.<sup>8</sup> The only occasion for which outside musicians were regularly paid by the Campo Santo during the 1570s was for the Corpus Christi procession held in May/June. We will probably never know for what exactly Marenzio provided music, but a Holy Thursday procession is the most likely.

---

<sup>4</sup> N. O'REGAN, *Processions and their music in post-Tridentine Rome*, «Recercare», 4 (1992), pp. 45-80.

<sup>5</sup> Roma, Archivio del Vicariato, Dottrina Cristiana (Arciconfraternita di Santa Maria del Pianto) 18, f. 104.

<sup>6</sup> Roma, Archivio di Stato, Ospedale Santissima Trinità dei Pellegrini, 1067, f. 139.

<sup>7</sup> Archivio del Campo Santo Teutonico, Liber 1, f. 526.

<sup>8</sup> Archivio del Campo Santo Teutonico, Liber 2: *Libro secondo dei conti, ricevute e ordinazioni di Campo Santo dall'anno 1580 sin'al'anno 1600*, non-foliated.

Whatever the occasion and the precise year, the payment quoted above definitively connects Marenzio both with Cardinal Madruzzo and with the Arciconfraternita di Santa Maria della Pietà in Campo Santo during his early years in Rome. Some years ago I drew attention to a document in the archives of another German/Flemish confraternity in Rome, that of Santa Maria dell'Anima, which was based in the church of the same name near the Piazza Navona.<sup>9</sup> This document details the payment of 4 *scudi* and 60 *baiocchi* to the unnamed *maestro di cappella* of Cardinal Madruzzo for musicians for the Corpus Christi procession organised by that confraternity in June 1575.<sup>10</sup> While the Campo Santo payment doesn't confirm that Marenzio was Madruzzo's *maestro* in that year, it does make it even more likely that the 1575 payment by Santa Maria dell'Anima was also made to Marenzio.

When might Marenzio have originally arrived in Rome? Marco Bizzarini and others have suggested that he transferred from Mantua to Rome and the service of Cardinal Madruzzo in 1574.<sup>11</sup> The second new archival document may help us here. It comes from the archives of the Arciconfraternita dei Santi Carlo e Ambrogio dei Lombardi and records a payment on 5 April 1574 of four *scudi*

a M[aest]ro Luca m[aest]ro de capella del orat[atori]o p[er] la sua p[ro]vis[i]on[e]  
di No[vem]bre, Dec[em]bre et Gien[nar]o.<sup>12</sup>

This refers to the three-month period from November 1573 to January 1574. It is certainly tempting to equate this Luca with Luca Marenzio and there are plausible reasons for doing so. He is the only musician with this sole Christian name to appear in Roman archives of this period. The only other candidate, Giovanni Luca Conforti, falsettist in the Cappella Pontificia and publisher of embellishments, is never referred to as Luca and, as his birthdate is generally assumed to have been c. 1560, he would have been too young in 1573-74.<sup>13</sup> Brescia was geographically part of Lombardy, though belonging at this time to the Venetian Republic, and so it would not have been strange for the young Marenzio to gravitate to the Lombard confraternity during his early years in Rome, leading to his appointment in the oratory there. The Compagnia di Sant'Ambrogio was given papal approval by Pope Sixtus IV in

---

<sup>9</sup> N. O'REGAN, *Marenzio's sacred music: the Roman context*, «Early Music», 27 (1999), pp. 609-620.

<sup>10</sup> Roma, Archivio di Santa Maria dell'Anima, E.I.10, f. 55. For the musical tradition of S. Maria dell'Anima see R. HEYINK, *Fest und Musik als Mittel kaiserlicher Machtpolitik. Das Haus Habsburg und die deutsche Nationalkirche in Rom S. Maria dell'Anima*, Schneider, Tutzing 2010 (Wiener Veröffentlichungen zur Musikwissenschaft, 44).

<sup>11</sup> BIZZARINI, *Marenzio*, p. 17. S. LEDBETTER/J. CHATER - R. JACKSON, s.v. *Marenzio, Luca*, in *New Grove*<sup>2</sup>, 15, pp. 835-845.

<sup>12</sup> Roma, Archivio Storico dell'Arciconfraternita dei Santi Ambrogio e Carlo della Nazione Lombarda, 89: *Libro di Mandati 1573-1581*, f. 16v.

<sup>13</sup> D. NUTTER, s.v. *Conforti, Giovanni Luca* in *New Grove*<sup>2</sup>, 6, p. 282.

1471.<sup>14</sup> After the canonisation of san Carlo Borromeo in 1611 it was raised to the rank of an archconfraternity under the dual names of santi Ambrogio e Carlo. The present church on the Via del Corso was also begun in 1612, replacing an earlier church and oratory on the same site.

The next payment to a *maestro del oratorio* after the one to Maestro Luca was made on 11 May 1574 to cover April and then regular payments of one *scudo* continued to be paid monthly until December of that year.<sup>15</sup> Unfortunately the *maestro* is not named, so we cannot know whether or not these were also made to Maestro Luca. In March 1575 one «M. Jacomo cantor» was paid two *scudi* for singing falsobordone in the oratory on feastdays.<sup>16</sup> There is then a gap until 14 October 1575 when M. Lorenzo Mencucci «m[aestr]o de falsobordoni de n[ost]ro oratorio» was paid one *scudo* for one month up to the 13th of October, followed by a similar payment for the month to 13 November.<sup>17</sup> Thereafter there are no surviving payments until 1599 when «Bartolomeo Geli cantore del oratorio» was paid 1.20 *scudi* for the first three months of the year.<sup>18</sup> From June 1603 to April 1614 Giovanni Briccio, «mastro del coro del nostro oratorio» was paid one *scudo* a month.<sup>19</sup> Prior to M[aestr]o Luca's appearance in 1573-4 the only other payment was to one «Gio[vanni] Francese», paid one *scudo* «per la sua p[ro]visione d'imparare il falsobordone alli giovani del oratorio p[er] Marzo passato».<sup>20</sup>

What might this position in the oratory – variously called «maestro di cappella del oratorio», «maestro del coro del nostro oratorio», «maestro de falsobordone», «cantore del oratorio» – actually have involved? Was there a proper, regular, choir based in the confraternity's oratory? There is no evidence for this and no payments survive to singers. What must have been the case here was that, as in other Roman confraternity oratories, a small group of members of the confraternity who were regular frequenters of the oratory sang falsobordone during devotional services, such as the chanting of part of the divine office on feastdays, and during processions. The 1569 statutes of the Arciconfraternita di Sant'Ambrogio speak specifically of setting up their oratory in the context of following the lead of other national confraternities; significantly the word «oratorio» is used as much in the sense of a devotional exercise as of a particular building:

---

<sup>14</sup> MARONI LUMBROSO - MARTINI, *Le Confraternite romane*, pp. 35-40. See also G. BONOLA LORELLA, *Arciconfraternita dei Ss. Ambrogio e Carlo della Nazione lombarda in Roma*, Tipografia dell'Unione Cooperativa Editrice, Roma 1907.

<sup>15</sup> Archivio dei Santi Ambrogio e Carlo, 89, f. 19v.

<sup>16</sup> Archivio dei Santi Ambrogio e Carlo, 89, f. 32.

<sup>17</sup> Archivio dei Santi Ambrogio e Carlo, 89, f. 40.

<sup>18</sup> Archivio dei Santi Ambrogio e Carlo, 91, *Libro di Mandati 1591-1611*, f. 158.

<sup>19</sup> Archivio dei Santi Ambrogio e Carlo, 91, *Libro di Mandati 1591-1611*, ff. 186, 192v.

<sup>20</sup> Archivio dei Santi Ambrogio e Carlo, 89, f. 16.

Et perche l'altre nationi c[he] hano hospitale in Roma tengono li loro Oratorii nelli quali laudano il Signore Dio con il cantare nelli giorni delle feste sacri officii, et certe devote orationi: et gia sono qualche giorni che da alcune divote persone d'essa natione desiderose laudare il Sig[nore] Dio per li infiniti benefici concessoli fu dato principio al detto oratorio, si e ordinato et stabilito che si continui il detto oratorio; et si pregano con ogni affettione tutti li fratelli che si risolvano frequentarlo, facendosi descrivere nel libro a cio deputato, et vestiti del sacco solito.<sup>21</sup>

While the bulk of this chanting of the offices would have been in plainchant, some falsobordone was also used. Because falsobordone singers were not regularly paid for their services, it is difficult to find specific information about its use, apart from payments like that quoted above for teaching falsobordone to young boys. These were most likely the sons of confraternity members. As early as 1490, the statutes of the newly-amalgamated Compagnia del Gonfalone instructed the *maestro di canto figurato* who organised some voices in a *cappella* to also instruct the members or their sons to sing: «Item sia obligato insegnare de canto ad tutti li homini della compagnia o loro figlioli che volessero imparare». <sup>22</sup> In his study of the Venetian *Scuole grandi*, Jonathan Glixon distinguishes between the professional singers (the *cantadori de laude* or *cantadori nuovi*), who sang on major festal occasions and larger processions, and the amateur singers (*fadighenti*, *cantadori di corpi* or *cantadori vecchi*), who sang for funerals and smaller local processions.<sup>23</sup>

Assuming that Maestro Luca was indeed Marenzio, the Confraternita di Sant'Ambrogio may well have provided him with his first work after arriving in Rome, a useful starting position in which he would have taught falsobordone, and maybe simple polyphony, to members of the confraternity so that they could perform it in the oratory and during processions, which he would have directed. Little of this type of *Gebrauchsmusik* survives since it was largely improvised, but during the sixteenth century it was very commonly heard throughout the city; some small payments for groups of such singers at

---

<sup>21</sup> «And since the other nationalities which have a hospital in Rome also maintain their oratories in which they praise the Lord God by singing on feastdays the holy offices and certain devout prayers: and since it is now some days since some devout persons of our nation, desiring to praise the Lord God for the infinite benefits which he has conceded, began the said oratorio, it is ordained and prescribed that the said oratorio should be continued; and all the brothers are requested with all affection to resolve to frequent it, writing [their names] in the book for that purpose and dressed in the usual habit.» *Ordini della devota compagnia dell'hospitale di Santo Ambrogio della Nazione Lombarda*, eredi di Antonio Blado, Roma 1569. Quoted in G. BONOLA-LORELLA, *Arciconfraternita dei SS. Ambrogio e Carlo della Nazione Lombarda in Roma*, Tip. Unione Cooperativa Editrice, Roma 1907, pp. 271 ff.

<sup>22</sup> A. ESPOSITO, *Le "confraternite" del Gonfalone (secoli XIV-XV)*, «Ricerche per la storia religiosa di Roma», 5 (1984), pp. 91-136.

<sup>23</sup> J. GLIXON, *Honoring God and the City: Music at the Venetian Confraternities, 1260-1807*, Oxford University Press, Oxford - New York 2003, p. 94.

processions do appear in Roman confraternity archives.<sup>24</sup> Maestro Luca was employed as *maestro di cappella* of the Lombard oratory from at least November 1573 to January 1574 and maybe for longer. This work could have coincided with, or predated, Marenzio's service for Cardinal Madruzzo. While not providing answers to all of the questions we have about Marenzio's early years in Rome, these two documents do throw some new light on those years when the composer was establishing himself in the city. While his reputation was made as a composer of madrigals for aristocratic houses, his early experience was, like that of his contemporaries, also shaped by providing sacred music – much of it ephemeral – for at least two of Rome's religious institutions.

---

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, N. O'REGAN, *Music at the Roman Archconfraternity of San Rocco in the late sixteenth century*, in *La musica a Roma attraverso le fonti d'archivio*, atti del convegno internazionale, Roma 4-7 Giugno 1992, a cura di B. M. Antolini, A. Morelli e V. V. Spagnuolo, LIM, Lucca 1994, pp. 521-552.



---

**Noel O'Regan** is a Reader in music at the University of Edinburgh. He is the author of the Royal Musical Association monograph, *Institutional Patronage in Post-Tridentine Rome*, as well as numerous articles on Roman sacred music in the late 16th and early 17th centuries. He has also published on Rome-based composers including Lasso, Palestrina, Marenzio and Victoria, and is currently engaged in a study of the role of music in Roman confraternities in this period. He is a member of the editorial board of the New Palestrina Edition for which he has edited a volume of the composer's triple-choir music.

**Noel O'Regan** é Lettore in musica presso l'Università d'Edimburgo. Ha pubblicato il libro *Institutional Patronage in Post-Tridentine Rome* nella serie monografica della Royal Musical Association, e numerosi saggi sulla musica sacra a Roma tra il tardo Cinquecento e il primo Seicento. Ha pubblicato anche studi su vari compositori che hanno lavorato a Roma, come Lasso, Marenzio, Palestrina e Victoria. Attualmente è impegnato nello studio del ruolo che la musica ha avuto nelle confraternite romane di quel periodo. Fa parte del comitato scientifico della nuova edizione delle opere di Palestrina, per la quale ha curato il volume delle composizioni a tre cori.